What is Unesco?

Unesco stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Specialized Agency which, beginning in 1946 with 20 Member States, now has 158.

Its varied programmes range over convening international ministerial conferences to translating oriental classics, through multi-million dollar marine investigations to study of, for example, education against drug abuse.

Unesco's Constitution says that 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'. Building these defences through international co-operation remains Unesco's top priority.

Education

is Unesco's most wide-ranging programme. Highlights include: **literacy,** an uphill battle against rising populations—the number of illiterates is estimated at some 900 million, in spite of the fact that the overall world illiteracy rate continues to fall. Confronted with this global problem, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 1990 International Literacy Year. For Unesco, lead organization in mobilizing the world community, ILY is a 'Summons to Action', a launching-pad for efforts during the ensuing decade to drastically reduce illiteracy by the year 2000.

Teacher training. Although this is the longest-standing Unesco operation, it is probably the least known outside the countries affected. Over 100 projects are currently operational in Africa alone, and many thousands of teachers and administrators are trained with the help of Unesco.

Education for refugees. Unesco is currently involved in providing staff for 650 schools for 350,000 Palestine refugee children in a co-operative scheme with UNRWA.

Recognition of university diplomas. Conventions aimed at making students and teachers more mobile through acceptance of their qualifications have been adopted in all the world's major regions. The next step in this process, which takes years of negotiation and discussion, will be the drafting of a world convention.

Science and technology

Unesco's main mission of promoting international co-operation has been particularly fruitful in science because scientists the world over observe the same rules and speak the same technical language. International undertakings which can be of value to people around the globe include:

IOC, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, promotes marine scientific investigations with a view to learning more about the nature and resources of the oceans. High priority is given to projects such as the World Climate Research Programme.

MAB, Man and the Biosphere. This international programme of applied research on the interactions between man and his environment, started in the 1970s and is responsible for the creation of 273 biosphere reserves in 70 countries which protect precious genetic pools of flora and fauna. Over 110 countries are involved in the programme.

IGCP, the International Geological Correlation Programme sponsors some 50 projects covering all spheres of geology and geophysics worldwide. Working groups have been set up in 122 countries.

IHP, the International Hydrological Programme, aims to promote rational use and management of the earth's water resources, demands on which are expected to double within 30 years.

Other work of international value includes activities concerning the study of natural hazards such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and landslides, and projects dealing with research to combat desertification and improve the management of arid lands. Unesco is now placing particular emphasis on raising world consciousness to the threat of environmental degradation.

Culture

provides the field for Unesco's best known activities, particularly since the success of the campaign to save the monuments of Nubia (22 temples) and Borobudur (a 1,000-year-old Buddhist shrine entirely reconstructed). There are currently 29 campaigns in various stages, for example, the safeguard of the Historic City of Sana'a in the Yemen Arab Republic and of the world's oldest city, Moenjodaro, in Pakistan (over 4,000 years old) for which further international contributions are being sought.

Linking Unesco's work in science to its activities in culture is its action to protect the world cultural and natural heritage. By December 1988, 108 countries had ratified 'the World Heritage Convention' to safeguard sites as varied as The Great Wall of China, Kilimandjaro National Park, the Tower of London, Monticello and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu, more than 315 sites, all outstanding and all endangered. The World Heritage Fund provides aid for preservation projects.

Within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Cultural Development (1988-97), Unesco has launched 'The Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue' involving over 1,000 specialists working with the more than 35 countries situated along the caravan and maritime routes that linked East and West.

Other activities in culture include preservation of oral traditions, promotion of translations, work to give status to creative artists and support through the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture for activities ranging from film-making through training to the promotion of handicrafts.

Communication

Activities in this field have been carried out since Unesco's beginnings, following the requirement of its constitutional mandate 'to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image'. This has involved Unesco in e.g. journalists' training and help to provide infrastructures for television, radio and the press in developing countries. The main tool for this work is the International Programme for the Development of Communication (**IPDC**), a voluntarily-funded programme started on a US initiative. It has aided establishment of news agencies in Africa and Latin America, financed training and given aid to specific undertakings.

Unesco's work in the area of communication covers not only the information media, but also includes aid to Third World countries to computerize information services and the stimulation of book production. Unesco sponsored the Universal Copyright Convention, whose circled © now protects books the world over.

Social and human sciences

Current work is directed towards the fundamental application of social sciences, clarifying concepts, exploring the relationship with natural sciences and interdisciplinary research. While continuing work on racial discrimination, apartheid and human rights teaching, Unesco has undertaken studies on problems of development and socio-cultural environment, including research on youth and on the status of women. Activities also include helping to build up social science institutions.

Unesco works this way

Programmes are decided by a biennial General Conference of all Member States, who also supply the budget ($350,386,000 for 1988-1989) to carry it out. A 51-member Executive Board supervises execution of the programme by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat, drawn from more than 130 nationalities and a wide range of specialities, works either at Paris Headquarters or on projects around the globe. At its head is a Director-General elected for six years, currently Mr Federico Mayor, who was elected in 1987.

Most Member States have set up Unesco National Commissions to associate educational, scientific and cultural circles and the country's chief institutions with the Organization's work, to provide means of information and consultation, to

carry out projects, publish works, ensure participation in international programmes, organize conferences and spread Unesco's ideals. Many States also maintain their own Permanent Delegations at Unesco Headquarters.

More than 500 international non-governmental organizations have working and mutual information arrangements with Unesco. These 'NGOs' have national branches in a large number of countries uniting groups concerned with Unesco's work: educators, scientists, artists, librarians, museum experts, data specialists, journalists. Some big groups, such as trade unions, co-operatives and women's movements, can help to make Unesco's aims understood and supported throughout the world.

What Unesco publishes

Publications, considered an important means of action for Unesco since its founding, comprise those for the general public such as the periodical *The Unesco Courier*, and a large number of works aimed chiefly at specialists.

Broadly speaking, Unesco publications are of two kinds: (1) documentary publications presenting facts, often accompanied by analyses and published regularly, such as *Study Abroad* (a biennial list of study programmes in over 120 countries), the *Statistical Yearbook* and *Index Translationum*; (2) works about ideas, aimed at stimulating reflection on contemporary world problems and future orientations, such as *The International Dimensions of Human Rights*; *Arms, Arms Control and Disarmament*; *Educating against Drug Abuse*; *Biotechnologies and Development*, and others such as *The General History of Africa*.

Unesco publishes specialized periodicals such as *Impact of Science on Society*, *Nature and Resources*, *Museum*, the *International Social Science Journal*, and *Prospects* (educational quarterly).

A general catalogue of all publications can be obtained upon request. Unesco publications can be ordered from booksellers or directly from Unesco sales agents. In case of any difficulty, apply to Unesco's Bookshop in Paris.

What Unesco produces

Unesco produces photographic documentation, radio and video programmes dealing with current events and covering Unesco activities at Headquarters and in the Field.

How to support Unesco's work:

To reach its objectives, Unesco needs the backing of all the peoples of the world. A growing number of personalities from the world of arts are involved in sensitizing world public opinion to Unesco's activities. So far, the following have received the title of Unesco's Goodwill Ambassadors: Placido Domingo, Miguel Angel Estrella, Ivry Gitlis, Barbara Hendricks, Ikuo Kirayama, Marcel Marceau, Ivo Pogorelic, Sviatoslav Richter and Omar Sharif.

A wide range of possibilities is open to those who want to give their support:

- promoting the worldwide movement of Unesco Clubs which aims to associate public opinion with the activities of Unesco and the United Nations;
- helping the development of Unesco Associated Schools which strive to educate young people in a spirit of international understanding;
- contributing to Unesco's Co-Action Programme, which every year gives financial aid to more than 100 grass roots projects in the world's poorest countries;
- participating in non-governmental organizations which work with Unesco in its programme;
- subscribing to one of the Organization's periodicals, such as *The Unesco Courier* and making it known;
- visiting Unesco's Paris Headquarters with a group for a free briefing;
- taking the initiative to celebrate some of the United Nations International Days such as Human Rights Day on 10 December—and promoting the aims of the International Year under way.

Unesco's activities are described in greater detail in a monthly news magazine, *Unesco Sources*, issued by the Office of Public Information (OPI).

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